

1. What are “social innovations” when discussed in the context of development of European cities? Who should initiate such social innovations? Could you give some specific examples of such innovations and their influence on the development of a given city?

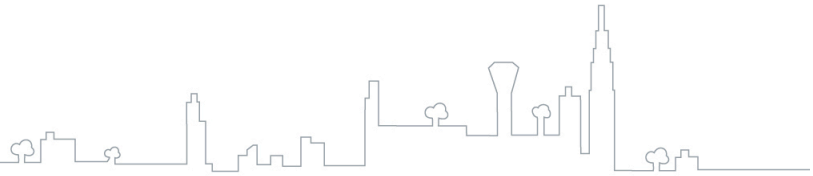
Cities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are facing complex challenges – from housing, to migration, to environmental sustainability - that require new, creative solutions. In Europe, where over 70 per cent of the population now live in urban areas, creativity and social innovation in cities are central to securing their long-term economic, cultural and social prosperity.

Many strategies and plans adopted by cities in the interest of becoming more creative are concerned with strengthening the arts and cultural assets. But creativity and social innovation is needed in all aspects of a city’s life, not just its cultural life; truly creative cities – for example, Curitiba, Brazil, or Portland, US - are those that apply creativity to fields as diverse as governance, education, housing, waste, transport, health and employment.

Social innovation involves more than creativity alone; a socially innovative city needs to generate ideas in response to changing needs, and to turn those ideas action. Social innovation is the structured development of new ideas to turn them into more effective solutions to social needs. Social innovations can take the form of a new service, initiative or organisation, or, alternatively, a radically new approach to the organisation and delivery of services.

Current examples range from Bilbao creating a social innovation business park to Amsterdam’s De Waag, from projects to integrate migrants in Marseilles and Malmö to magazines for the homeless in London and Manchester, to innovative care for the elderly in Helsinki.

Social innovation in cities should be a social and collaborative process. Innovation is a process of combination – combining different ideas, insights and people to come up with something new. The process of combination is more likely to be creative if the people involved think in different ways and bring diverse skills and perspectives. Traditionally, addressing social challenges in cities has been the remit of specialists and ‘experts’ such as urban planners, architects and engineers. But top-down city planning can often stifle everyday innovation, or drive it underground. These days, cities are looking for a better balance between top-down infrastructures – initiated by the state, and/or specialists - and bottom-up engagement from citizens. In a city, many power-holders and stakeholders have to be involved in social innovation. These can include leaders in the spheres of business, politics and/or entrepreneurship, local and/or central government, third sector organisations, activists and pressure groups, and the general public.



The examples of creativity and social innovation in cities are vast and wide-ranging. Many of these are documented in the Young Foundation report, *Breakthrough Cities*, commissioned by the British Council as part of its Creative Cities programme.

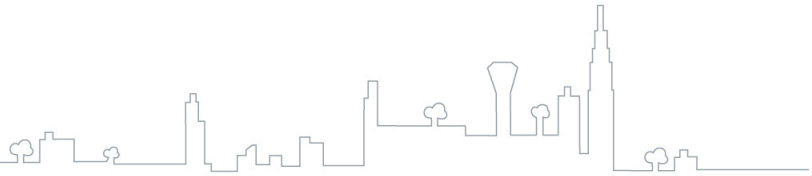
2. What can cities do (directly and indirectly) to contribute to the creation of social innovations?

The social structure of cities, how power is shared and connected, the way in which cities mobilise their social networks of business and civic leaders, and how they attract outsiders with ideas and capital, all have a bearing on social innovation. Cities with high levels of social and cultural diversity, accompanied by a history of tolerance, provide fertile ground for social creativity and innovation. Openness to external influence and knowledge is a key feature of creative cities and regions. Cities with networks that are outward-looking and welcoming to outsiders attract outsiders with ideas, connections and capital all of which can stimulate social innovation. Successful cities have many distributed spaces for creativity to thrive, and seek a balance between top-down regulation, and bottom-up engagement from citizens. Over-centralisation, an agglomeration of political, cultural and economic power in one place, and entrenched networks of power and patronage can limit social creativity and innovation.

The presence of strong leaders – with a passion and commitment, and openness to innovation – can also play a critical role in getting innovation started, providing it with political legitimacy and cover. Some of the outstanding examples can be found in surprising places – like Antanas Mockus the mayor of Bogotá who used mime artists to control the traffic, installed bicycle roadways, and even announced a day a month when men should stay at home and look after the children.

3. An increasing number of cities and regions have recently started thinking about developing their own brands, understood not as the mere visual symbol (a logo, CI etc.), but rather as a whole strategy of social-economic development of a given place. Does this idea of a city brand support the social innovation concept? Can it be treated as a form of social innovation?

Unlike companies and products, places cannot construct or manipulate their images simply through good advertising and PR, slogans or logos. The advocates of city rebranding – such as Charles Landry and Geoff Mulgan in the 1990s and Simon Anholt in the 2000s, emphasise that countries, regions and cities can earn a better and stronger reputation not by what they *say* but by focussing on what they *make and do*; it is about putting talk and ideas into action. This can take the form of visionary approaches to innovation, investment and education, and (social/economic/environmental/foreign) policy-making; commitment to tackling problems on a global stage – for example international development and poverty reduction; and productive engagement and coordination with institutions across the board from all spheres of society, and from local to international levels. City branding, from this



perspective, is very much aligned with the concept of social innovation, and is likely to become integral to city-making in the future.

4. Poland is a country where living standards of many city inhabitants are still not very high and where large proportion of the society is only focused on winning their everyday bread. Do you think that there is a place for social innovations in such a country?

Yes. Creativity and innovation often thrives in spaces where people have to improvise because they have few resources, or where there is a powerful driving need. Numerous cities that are viewed as leaders in relation to global problems are resource-poor settings – for example, the waste management programmes operating in Curitiba (Brazil) and Bangalore (India) which promote environmental sustainability as well as poverty alleviation through income generation; or the Bus Rapid Transit System of Bogotá (Columbia), which has become a model for mass transport systems in countries world-wide; and world-renowned social enterprises, such as the Grameen Bank (centred in the rural villages of Bangladesh), which offers a way out of poverty through micro-credit.

5. How vital is it for social innovation to take place in a city that is governed by a strong, charismatic leader, a visionary?

A charismatic or visionary leader is neither a sufficient nor necessary requirement for social innovation in a city. Many successful social innovations in the city context are driven from the bottom up, by the imaginations, pressure and campaigning of collectives of citizens and activists – rather than driven, from above, by the vision of an individual leader. However, harnessing and channelling the support and resources of established leaders – charismatic, or otherwise – can play a vital role in facilitating bottom-up innovation.

6. How can the Polish marketing and consulting industry support the city in orienting itself towards social innovation?

Few people in marketing yet understand that the shape of the economy is changing radically. The biggest jobs growth – and business growth – in the next few years is set to come in sectors like health, care, education and environmental services, not in cars or retail banks. That's where cities and marketing strategies need to devote their attentions and where cities need to start building up comparative advantage.

*The interview was published in Brief Poland.*